CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Robert Dixon Fence Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	August 2008
Proponent:	Robert Dixon Trust
Location:	Section 14 & 15, T13S – R5W
County:	Beaverhead County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has received a request from Robert Dixon Trust to construct approximately 1.5 miles of new fence on leases he holds in Section 14 & 15, Township 13 South , Range 5 West in Beaverhead County. The fence would be build just north of the existing county road in the Centennial Valley. The proposed fence would start just north of the SE corner of Section 14, and cross the existing Wolverine Creek road in Section 14 . The road is maintained for public use by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). A metal gate will be supplied by the BLM, for installation by the lessee. From the Wolverine Creek Road the fence will continue on a due west bearing till it reaches the ¼ corner of Section 15. The fence is intended to keep cattle on the lease as well as reduce off road travel onto the State lease from the county road.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The following parties were contacted about this proposed project.

1. Patrick Rennie, DNRC Archeologist
2. Bob Branon Wildlife Biologist FWP
3. BLM, Dillon Field Office
4. Nathan Korb, Nature Conservancy

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Bureau of Land Management , Easement on Wolverine Creek Road (Easement in place)

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

A. **No Action Alternative, Under this alternative Lessee Robert Dixon Trust would not be allowed to build the fence.**

B. **Approve construction of Fence using BLM standard of construction of a four wire fence with a maximum top wire height of 42" and a minimum bottom wire height of 16" and install metal gate across Wolverine Creek road.**

C. **Approve construction of fence using BLM standard of construction of a four wire fence with a maximum wire height of 42" and a minimum bottom height of 16" install metal gate across Wolverine Creek road and have top and bottom wires barbless high tensile steel as recommended by Fish Wildlife and Parks Wildlife biologist Bob Brannon.**

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The USDA Natural Resources and Conservation staff hasn't completed soil surveys for this area. The 2004 DNRC Field Evaluation indicates the soils are silty to thin silty and overflow in the stream areas. Soils associated with these sites are very fine sand loams, loams and silt loams can be more than 20 inches deep. The overflows are soils that receive more than normal soil moisture because of run-in or stream overflow. Although these soils can be erosive, fence construction on relatively flat ground causes very little soil erosion or disturbance. The fence construction will have no long term effects to the soils quality or stability. Disturbed areas will be seeded with a mix of native grass species.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:
Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Two streams run through the proposed fence area (Second Wolverine Creek, and Swamp & Sandy Creek) The 2004 field evaluations describe the streams in the project area as having excellent water quality through out multiple springs in the Swamp and Sandy Creek drainages and OK water quality for the Second Wolverine Creek drainage.

Installing a fence across these drainages will have little effect on the long term water quality of these drainages. The fence will help control the grazing practices and off road travel by recreationists which should help prevent stream degradation.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

The proposed action will not impact air quality in the Centennial Valley. Construction may produce dust during construction but the area is sparsely populated and duration of disturbance will be of short duration.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The construction of a fence will have no appreciable impacts upon the vegetative communities in the area. A Natural Heritage Program search didn't identify any threatened or sensitive plant species or communities with in the project area.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The fencing standards proposed under this project follow those for cattle that are utilized by the BLM with the top wire at 42 in., second wire at 30in, third wire a 22 in., and fourth wire 16 in. These fence dimensions are

considered suitable to not appreciably impede wildlife crossing or movements by wildlife biologists from many different government agencies.

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks biologist Bob Brannon comments included the following. " I see no major problem with the fence as proposed to BLM standard. It would certainly be helpful to wildlife movement if the fence could be barbless using, for example , high tensile steel wire."

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Montana Natural Heritage program was contacted regarding species of concern within the project area. No endangered species were listed within the project area. There were five sensitive species of concern; Gray Wolf, Greater Sage Grouse, Pygmy Rabbit, Wolverine, and Ferruginous Hawk.

Gray Wolf (**Canus Lupus**) Wolves are distributed throughout Southwest Montana. The project would not have any measurable effect on wolf prey or wolves, thus direct, indirect , or cumulative effects are not anticipated.

Greater Sage-grouse (**Centrocercus Urophasianus**) Greater sage Grouse use has been recorded in the project area. The DNRC is not aware of any important breeding leks in the vicinity. If sage-grouse are using the tracts, they could be directly disturbed and displaced by activities associated with fence construction, however, the disturbance would be short term and would not be expected to have a measureable impact on sage – grouse. Maesureable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would not be anticipated as a result of the proposed project.

Ferruginous Hawk (**Buteo Regalis)** Ferruginous hawks have been sighted near the proposed project area. It is a BLM sensitive species and has been sighted within the project area. The project would not cause direct, indirect , or cumulative effects on this species.

Pygmy Rabbit **(Brachylagus idahoensis**) Pygmy Rabbits have been observed approximately 1.5 miles north of the project area. It is a BLM and US Forest Service sensitive species. This project would not cause direct , indirect, or cumulative effects on this species.

Wolverine (**Gulo gulo**) Wolverine have relatively continuous habitat within the Gravelly, Greenhorn and Snowcrest mountain ranges. This project falls outside the wolverine range by several miles. The BLM and US Forest Service list the wolverine as a sensitive species. This project would not cause direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on this species.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The Montana DNRC Archeologist was contacted about this proposal. Although no cultural resource inspection has been done in the area of the proposed fence the archeologist felt there were no cultural resource concerns with this project proposal.

11. AESTHETICS:
Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The project would not alter the aesthetics of the area. Fencing is a common occurrence in the Centennial Valley and would have little impact on the visual features of the landscape. No cumulative effects to the aesthetics would occur due to this project.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The project would have little direct, indirect or cumulative effects to the land, water or energy resources in the project area.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

The Proponent of this project has also submitted a request for a historical easement across state ground into his deeded property in Section 11 T13S – R5W. No other know projects are proposed for this particular area so no cumulative impacts are expected from the construction of a fence in this area.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The presence of a new fence may result in safety risks to motorcycles, snowmobiles and horseback riders during times of poor visibility. A metal gate however, will be installed in the road right of way which will be more visible at night than a wire gate. This should help reduce safety concerns on the main right-of -way. No significant other impacts to human health and safety are anticipated because of this proposed action.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The fence should allow the lessee to better regulate and distribute livestock in the fenced area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The project would provide minimal short term employment for a fence contractor if a fence was constructed.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The fence will have no impact on the local or state tax base or on the tax revenue generated.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

This proposed action would not result in changes in demand for government services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The proposed project would not interfere with government zoning laws or management plans.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The proposed fence would have a minor impact on recreational use of the Wolverine Creek road. The fence will require the installation of a gate in the road right of way which will need to be opened and closed each time someone uses the road. This will cause a slight inconvience to recreationists who use the road.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

The proposed action will have no impact on density and distribution of population or housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

The proposed action will have no effect on social structures or traditional lifestyles.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not affect cultural uniqueness and diversity in the project area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

There will be no cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Timothy Egan	**Date:**	8/4//08
	Title:	Dillon Unit Supervisor		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected Alternative B—authorize improvement to construct the fence meeting BLM standards for a four strand barbed wire fence. The lessee uses this pasture for cattle and horses. The barbed wire bottom strand is needed to retain calves and the barbed wire top strand is needed to retain horses. Due to the remoteness of this location, the barbed wire is needed to prevent livestock from stretching and breaking wire. It is difficult to patrol and livestock could wander loose for quite some time before discovered.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Significant impacts are not expected as a result of implementing the proposed improvement. The fence construction is a very common activity and the standard proposed is effective for livestock retention while allowing for wildlife movement.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Garry Williams
	Title:	Area manager, Central Land Office
Signature: /S/ Garry Williams		**Date**: 8/8/2008

Proposed Wolverine Creek Fencing Project
Robert Dixon Trust
Sections 14 & 15, T 13S – R5W

North

Scale 1:24,000